

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

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DAR ES SALAAM 93

AMCONSUL LENINGRAD

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

USMISSION USUN

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 1806

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, UR, SS

SUBJECT: SOVIET OFFICIAL DISCUSSES SAHARA DISPUTE

1. DURING A FEB 5 CALL BY POLITICAL COUNSELOR, A.V. BUDARKOV, DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF THE MFA'S FIRST AFRICAN DIVISION, EMPHASIZED MOSCOW'S SUPPORT FOR THE PRINCIPLE OF SELF-DETERMINATION, AND STRESSED THE NEED FOR THE COUNTRIES INVOLVED IN THE SAHARA DISPUTE TO NEGOTIATE A SOLUTION AMONG THEMSELVES. BUDARKOV GAVE NO HINT THAT MOSCOW WOULD SOON RECOGNIZE THE POLISARIO FRONT AS A NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENT, BUT SAID THE SOVIET UNION WOULD PROBABLY FOLLOW SUIT SHOULD THE MAJORITY OF AFRICAN STATES DECIDE TO TAKE SUCH ACTION. IN GENERAL THE MFA OFFICIAL'S COMMENTS REINFORCED THE VIEW THAT

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MOSCOW WOULD PREFER NOT TO TAKE SIDES AND WOULD LIKE THIS

PROBLEM TO BE WORKED OUT BY THE PARTIES INVOLVED. END SUMMARY.

2. IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION ABOUT THE OFFICIAL SOVIET POSITION ON THE SAHARA ISSUE, BUDARKOV REPLIED THAT MOSCOW'S VIEWS WERE SET FORTH BY ITS REPRESENTATIVE TO THE UN DURING THE DEBATE LAST NOVEMBER. BUDARKOV REITERATED THAT THE USSR STRONGLY SUPPORTS THE PRINCIPLE OF SELF-DETERMINATION AND THE RIGHT OF PEOPLE TO CHOOSE THEIR OWN FATE. BUDARKOV SAID THAT MOSCOW SUPPORTED THE DECISION TO PLACE THE MATTER BEFORE THE ICJ, BUT MOROCCO REFUSED TO RECOGNIZE THE COURT'S AUTHORITY IN THIS MATTER. BECAUSE ALGERIA INSISTED ON THE RIGHT OF THE SAHARAN PEOPLE TO SELF-DETERMINATION, MOSCOW BELIEVED THAT THE ICJ PROVIDED THE BEST MEANS THROUGH WHICH A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT COULD HAVE BEEN REACHED. MOROCCO WAS INTRANSIGENT, HOWEVER, AND EMBARKED ON ITS MARCH INTO THE SAHARA. ACCORDING TO BUDARKOV, THE SOVIET UN REP STATED THAT THIS MARCH WAS NOT USEFUL AND, IN THE VOTING WHICH TOOK PLACE LAST NOVEMBER, THE USSR SUPPORTED THE ALGERIAN POSITION CALLING FOR SELF-DETERMINATION. THEREFORE, BUDARKOV SAID THE SOVIET UNION SUPPORTS THE SEARCH FOR A PEACEFUL SOLUTION NEGOTIATED PRINCIPALLY BY THE INTERESTED PARTIES, ALTHOUGH HE DID FORESEE A POSSIBLY CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE FOR THE UN.

3. ASKED ABOUT MOSCOW'S POSITION RE THE POLISARIO FRONT, BUDARKOV DECLARED THAT THE SOVIET UNION HAS NO DIRECT CONTACT WITH THE GROUP. BUDARKOV ADDED THAT THE QUESTION OF OAU RECOGNITION OF THE POLISARIO FRONT AS A LEGITIMATE LIBERATION MOVEMENT WAS DISCUSSED AT A RECENT MEETING OF THE OAU'S LIBERATION COMMITTEE IN DAR ES SALAAM DURING WHICH 14 COUNTRIES VOTED FOR THE GRANTING OF OFFICIAL STATUS AS A LIBERATION MOVEMENT, WHILE 3 COUNTRIES WERE OPPOSED. IF IN THE FUTURE A MAJORITY OF AFRICAN COUNTRIES WERE TO EXTEND OFFICIAL RECOGNITION, THE SOVIET UNION WOULD PROBABLY DO SO AS WELL, HE SAID.

4. BUDARKOV APPEARED RELUCTANT TO DISCUSS THE MEDIATION
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ATTEMPTS BY VARIOUS ARAB EMISSARIES, BUT HE SEEMED SKEPTICAL THAT OTHER ARAB COUNTRIES COULD CONTRIBUTE TO A SOLUTION.

5. BUDARKOV SAID THAT SOVIET BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH MOROCCO ARE "DEFINITELY FRIENDLY," AND ADDED THAT, ALTHOUGH MOSCOW VOTED AGAINST MOROCCO AT THE UN IN NOVEMBER, "KING HASSAN HAS A REALISTIC UNDERSTANDING

OF THE SOVIET POSITION."

6. LIBYA'S ROLE IN THE SAHARA DISPUTE IS NOT REALLY

CLEAR, BUDARKOV CONTINUED, BUT TRIPOLI'S PROPENSITY FOR SUPPORTING REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS PROBABLY LEADS IT TO SUPPORT ALGERIA. (BUDARKOV SLIPPED OFF A QUESTION ABOUT THE POSSIBLE PRESENCE IN ALGERIA OF LIBYAN MILITARY AIRCRAFT.)

7. BUDARKOV CLAIMED THE RESULTS OF THE LAMRANI MISSION TO WASHINGTON DEMONSTRATED THAT THE U.S. FAVORS MOROCCO. HE SAID HE FOUND THIS POLICY SOMEWHAT CONTRADICTORY IN THAT HE BELIEVED AMERICAN ECONOMIC INTERESTS-- ESPECIALLY IN NATURAL GAS -- WERE MUCH STRONGER IN ALGERIA THAN IN MOROCCO.

8. AS FOR THE FUTURE, HE STRESSED THE NEED FOR A PEACEFUL SOLUTION TO THE SAHARA PROBLEM, ACKNOWLEDGED THAT HE SAW NO SUCH SOLUTION ON THE IMMEDIATE HORIZON. IT WAS IMPERATIVE, HE CONCLUDED, THAT THE PARTIES TO THE DISPUTE AVOID HOSTILITIES IN THE SAHARA WHICH COULD POSSIBLY THREATEN A BROADER CONFLICT.

9. COMMENT. BUDARKOV THROUGHOUT STRESSED THE "PRINCIPLED" NATURE OF SOVIET POLICY IN THE SAHARA. WHILE HE GAVE NO INDICATION THAT MOSCOW WAS ON THE VERGE OF DUBBING THE POLISARIO FRONT A NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENT, HIS EXPLANATION THAT THE SOVIETS WILL IN ALL LIKELIHOOD RECOGNIZE POLISARIO FOLLOWING SUCH ACTION BY AFRICAN STATES STRIKES US AS A PLAUSIBLE PORTRAYAL OF MOSCOW'S POSITION. THE SOVIETS ARE PROBABLY RELUCTANT TO GET TOO FAR OUT IN FRONT OF THE

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OAU ON THIS PARTICULAR QUESTION. IN SUM, BUDARKOV'S PRESENTATION REINFORCED THE VIEW THAT MOSCOW PROBABLY HOPES THIS DISPUTE WILL SOON BE RESOLVED BY THE PARTIES CONCERNED, AND THUS OBIVIATE THE NECESSITY FOR THE SOVIET UNION TO TAKE SIDES. END COMMENT.

10. BIO. BUDARKOV, WHO IS PERSONALLY VERY PLEASANT, SAID HE HAD NEVER SERVED IN THE REGION FOR WHICH HE IS NOW RESPONSIBLE (NORTHWEST AFRICA, THE COUNTRIES OF THE SAHARA, AND SEVERAL SMALLER SUB-SAHARA COUNTRIES OF WEST AFRICA), BUT THAT HE WAS A "GENUINE AFRICANIST" WHO HAD SERVED AS AMBASSADOR TO ETHIOPIA FROM 1959-65, AND TO THE CONGO FROM 1969-72. BEFORE THAT HE DID TOURS IN FRANCE AND CZECHOSLOVAKIA. IN MOSCOW, HE LIVES AT 26 KUTUZOVSKY PROSPEKT, WHERE BREZHNEV AND

ANDROPOV ALSO HAVE APARTMENTS.
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